

# Health Literacy and Partnering in Your Child's Care

As a parent, you probably consider yourself a health expert when it comes to your own child. Only you know how to decode the signs that mean your little one isn't feeling quite right. Sometimes you know she's sick before she even does.

Pediatrician count on parents being that type of expert and see them as a critical partner in their child's healthcare. The parent-pediatrician partnership works best when moms and dads are *health literate*.

Health literacy is being able to access, read, understand, and use information in order to care for your child. It may sound simple, but when there's an overwhelming amount of information available to consumers, good health literacy has never been more important.

By practicing these health literacy skills before (and during) your next pediatrician's visit, you and your child can get the most out of the appointment – and reduce your chances of needing to visit the emergency room.

**Write down what and when.** Before the appointment, write down what your child's main symptoms are, if the symptoms impact his behavior, when the symptoms started and if the symptoms are always there or come and go. Bring your symptom list to the visit. Having notes to refer to can help ensure you don't forget anything, and help the doctor make the right diagnosis.

**Please repeat that.** Many doctors may use words or explanations that are difficult to understand. If this happens– stop your pediatrician and ask her to explain it to you in a different way. The better you understand what's happening with your child's health, the better you'll be able to take care of them.

**Ask how long.** Before you leave, ask your physician when she thinks your child will start feeling better and what types of symptoms would prompt another doctor's appointment.

**Take notes.** Jotting down notes during the visit can help you keep track of details and instructions. If your physician is comfortable with it, record the appointment on your smart phone. If your child is really sick or has a complex medical problem, bring a friend or relative who can act as a second pair of ears.

**Get a resource referral.** Ask your pediatrician or health insurance provider if they have any additional services, websites, apps, or books that they think are reliable sources of health information.

**Do a med check.** Medicine labels and dosing instructions can be tricky– but it’s critical that you know how to give your child medicine. Pharmacists are excellent resources that can help you decipher a bottle label, measure a medication, and understand what side effects to look out for.

**Health literacy – pass it on.** Around the age of 5 or 6, encourage your kids to interact with the pediatrician to talk about symptoms and ask questions. Teenagers can fill out their own medical forms. This teaches your child how to communicate about their health– an important lifelong skill.

When you have good health literacy, chances are your children will be healthier, too. Don’t forget that physician’s assistants and nurses can also be amazing sources of information and advice.

Courtesy of Children’s Hospital

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